**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**
REGION 4
ATLANTA FEDERAL CENTER
61 FORSYTH STREET
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-8960

AUG 1 3 2004

Dear Task Force Members:

A recent analysis by EPA's Atlanta Regional Office (Region 4) suggests that the strategy to further reduce the size of the hypoxic zone might also benefit from reductions in phosphorus loadings, in addition to nitrogen reductions (enclosed). Reducing both nutrients also would support achieving the second goal of the *Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico* (*Action Plan*) – to restore water quality throughout the Mississippi River Basin. EPA believes that decisions of the Task Force regarding future directions would benefit from the answers to the following science and policy questions:

- Should efforts to reduce Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) hypoxia include reduction of both the nitrogen and phosphorus loads from the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River to the Gulf?
- If it is determined that efforts to reduce Gulf hypoxia should include reduction of both the nitrogen and phosphorus loads from the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River to the Gulf, then what should the reduction goals be for each nutrient load?
- Would the reduction goals for phosphorous and nitrogen be dependent upon the season?
- If a phosphorus load reduction is recommended should the focus of efforts be on reduction of total phosphorus, phosphate only, or both?
- What additional monitoring, modeling, and research should be conducted in order to better answer the above questions?

The Task Force, at its upcoming meeting (August 31 - September 1, 2004), will consider an approach for assessing progress to date and charting a future course for the *Action Plan*. EPA will recommend that the Monitoring, Modeling and Research Subcommittee (MMR), as part of this reassessment, convene an expert scientific peer review panel to consider these questions, along with all available supporting science, including the enclosed Region 4 work. We also will recommend that the MMR invite marine scientists most qualified to address these specific questions to participate in the review.

While this reassessment is underway, we strongly encourage a continuation of efforts in the approach of the Task Force to reducing Gulf hypoxia, as outlined in the *Action Plan*. There is much evidence supporting the need to decrease nitrogen loads to reduce the extent of hypoxia in the Gulf. The process of developing the science basis for the *Action Plan* involved a substantial scientific effort to synthesize the available information, and underwent an extensive peer review.

We look forward to working with the Task Force on this. If you have any questions, or wish to discuss this please call me at 404.562.9470, or William Melville of my staff at 404.562.9266.

Sincerely,

James D. Giattina, Director
Water Management Division

cc: Herb Buxton (Co-Chair (USGS), Monitoring, Modeling and Research Subcommittee)

Rob Magnien (Co-Chair (NOAA), Monitoring, Modeling and Research Subcommittee)

Enclosure